

## **Five South Carolina public schools win prestigious**

### **Blue Ribbon School Awards**

Five South Carolina nominees were honored today by the U.S. Department of Education as National Blue Ribbon Schools. The winning schools represent the complete slate of Palmetto State schools nominated last fall by the State Department of Education for the prestigious award.

The National Blue Ribbon Schools program honors public and private K-12 schools whose students achieve at the highest levels or have made significant progress in closing achievement gaps.

The honorees are Honea Path Elementary School in Anderson District 2, Pate Elementary School in Darlington County, Carolina Forest Elementary School in Horry County, Midway Elementary School Lexington District 1, and Fort Mill High School in York District 4.

“We are extremely proud of these schools,” said State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum. “They have created education environments where expectations for all children are high and where commitments to improvement and excellence have shown wonderful results. Our five winners are role models for other schools across the state and nation.”

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige said that schools chosen for the National Blue Ribbon “are meeting our mission to ensure that every child learns, and no child is left behind. Blue Ribbon recipients will be national models of excellence that others can learn from.”

The National Blue Ribbon Schools program was modified two years ago so that the selection criteria corresponded philosophically with the goals of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The State Department of Education was asked to submit nominees to the USDE based on two sets of criteria: achieving in the top 10 percent of the nominating state’s schools or showing significant improvement. South Carolina’s five winners exceeded the achievement levels of other state schools with similar student populations. The differences in student achievement between demographic subgroups were also reduced. And in all cases, they met criteria for NCLB-Adequate Yearly Progress and South Carolina’s state accountability system.

**Honea Path Elementary School (Anderson District 2)** is a rural school where more than 45 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The school has dramatically improved student achievement over the years, and its success underscores a firm belief that the school’s mission is to educate all students to attain their maximum educational potential. The school has an excellent curriculum and instructional program and a strong school culture that encourages teacher collaboration. Known as “The School with the Big Heart,” Honea Path has a family learning coordinator who communicates with parents, conducts parenting workshops, provides information on available resources, and helps parents understand the district’s early childhood initiatives.

**Pate Elementary School (Darlington County)** is a high-poverty school that performed at the top 10 percent of all schools in the state. Five years ago, Pate was a low-performing school. A strong leadership with a philosophy that all children can learn at high levels has been pivotal in the school’s turnaround. At Pate Elementary, students are provided with leadership opportunities that build confidence and capability. The principal meets with parents monthly to share assessment data and effective instructional practices. Parents are encouraged to make suggestions, share concerns and ask questions. The school’s literacy program emphasizes fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and phonics. Journal writing is an integral part of the curriculum. Students are engaged in technology through an automated library system, digital cameras, computerized Accelerated Reader tests and writing publication.

**Carolina Forest Elementary School (Horry County)**, ranks in the top 10 percent of schools in the state in student achievement despite having more than 40 percent of its students on free or reduced-price lunches. Collaboration among teachers is one of the major positive characteristics at Carolina Forest Elementary. Grade-level teachers in the school share common planning times each day. Data analysis is the heart of school improvement and serves as the vehicle that drives instruction. Once a week, teachers

collaborate with the instructional coach to systematically analyze and interpret assessment data in order to implement effective teaching strategies. The school's goal is to conference with 100 percent of its parents, so staff members make home visits to parents who are unable to attend school conferences. The "Authors on the Beach" conference attracts more than 600 teachers from across the state and nation who meet with writers and illustrators of children's literature.

**Midway Elementary School (Lexington District 1)** has an open-door policy that creates an atmosphere where parents feel they can ask questions, seek advice and even challenge curriculum. Service learning and character education are integral parts of the curriculum. Through technology, teachers connect with other colleagues and use shared folders to develop lesson plans for creating learning units. A Palmetto Gold Award recipient for the past three years, this school has also received a Red Carpet award for its family-friendly efforts and achieved flagship status with the Schools of Promise program. Over the past few years, more than 700 teachers from other schools have visited Midway's classrooms to observe language art, foreign language and arts instruction.

**Fort Mill High (York District 4)** is the only high school in South Carolina to receive this honor in 2004. The school has a long-standing reputation for providing quality education, was named a 2000-01 U.S. Department of Education New American High School, and has been a High School That Works site since 1993. Fort Mill High will be among 30 high schools showcased this summer at the national Model Schools conference, and it is a state model visitation site for restructuring curriculum around clusters and majors. Students begin ninth-grade in the "freshman house." Smaller learning communities are sustained beyond the freshman year with career clusters and supporting majors. Administrators, faculty and staff have shared their successes during presentations throughout the Southeast and in several other states, including Hawaii and Alaska.